



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Will Benny Gantz's departure from the war cabinet lead to a change in Israeli policy?



Former Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz had little choice but to leave the war cabinet and thus keep his word from the May **ultimatum** to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to present a plan for further confrontation with Hamas by June 8.

With his demand at the time, Gantz called on Prime Minister Netanyahu to "choose between victory and disaster." He specifically asked for a plan that included the elimination of Hamas, the return of hostages to Israel, the establishment of an alternative administration in the Gaza Strip, and the return of Israeli residents to the northern part of the country.

Mr Gantz's **departure** from the three-member war cabinet, which also includes Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, takes Israel back politically to the time before October 7.

This is the situation in which Benjamin Netanyahu has a slim majority of 64 out of the 120 members of the Knesset and a far-right government that has struggled to deal with public outrage over its attempts to rein in the judiciary and the country's democratic institutions in general.

With the departure of Benny Gantz as the principal opposition rival from the war cabinet, Netanyahu has a parliamentary majority in hand but relatively low legitimacy to govern a country in conflict with pro-Iranian forces in Gaza and the north of the country.

Unity factor

It was Mr Gantz's participation in the war cabinet that gave Netanyahu's government the credibility of national unity at a time when the country's security was under threat. Since Sunday, that credibility has been missing.

"Fateful strategic decisions are met with hesitancy and procrastination due to political considerations," Gantz said last Sunday, explaining his departure from the war cabinet.

His argument that PM Netanyahu has

instrumentalised the action in Gaza for his political goals has gained strength after US President Joe Biden recently took the same position.

Netanyahu is prolonging the war in Gaza for personal political survival - Joe Biden

"There is every reason for people to conclude that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is prolonging the war in Gaza for personal political survival," **said** President Biden in a recent interview with Time magazine.

This was Washington's harshest criticism of Prime Minister Netanyahu to date and was in line with the current arguments of the prime minister's internal political opponents in Israel, of which Benny Gantz is the leading one.

Increasing pressure

Netanyahu's adamant opposition to American peace initiatives was the other driving force behind Gantz's departure from the war cabinet. Mr Gantz sees this as a major blow to Israel's relations with its most significant ally, and his departure from the war cabinet is a sign that he believes such divergence threatens to cause irreparable damage to relations with the US.

Given that only the far-right political spectrum now supports Netanyahu's government, Mr Gantz's move will undoubtedly increase pressure on it. However, it is uncertain whether this pressure will lead to the early elections that Mr Gantz is seeking.

When he left the war cabinet, he called for elections in the autumn, but it is not certain that the pressure he is already exerting on Prime Minister Netanyahu will be strong enough to lead to early elections in just a few months.

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Poll ratings for Netanyahu and his Likud party have **increased**, recovering in recent months from a large gap with Gantz and his centrist National Unity party.

According to polls from the end of May, the public favours Netanyahu over Gantz (36% to 30%) for prime minister for the first time in a year.

The timing of Mr Gantz's decision to leave the war cabinet could also be risky for his political prospects. He had originally scheduled the press conference announcing his resignation from the war cabinet for Saturday, but then postponed it to a day later because of the IDF action that freed four Israeli hostages from the Gaza Strip.

The operation undoubtedly boosted Netanyahu's and his partners' popularity, as the spectacular release of the hostages brought relief not only to the nation but also to the government, which was under constant pressure to bring the kidnapped Israelis home.

A risky move

Additionally, Gantz's action will undoubtedly draw criticism because it undermines the unity that the war effort needs to succeed.

“This is exactly what Sinwar, Nasrallah and Iran were aiming for, and unfortunately you are fulfilling their request,” wrote Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, one of the ultra-right hawks in Netanyahu's government, on social media.



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This is the reason why Benny Gantz is striving to secure early elections in the autumn, a goal he has advocated for. He believes that the passage of time, coupled with the delay of action in Gaza and possible new actions to rescue the hostages, would strengthen Netanyahu and his ultra-right partners' positions.

On the other hand, Prime Minister Netanyahu is the only one with the mandate to declare an end to the action in Gaza, thereby initiating Israel's return to peace mode. He has been manipulating this position for a long time, even at the cost of open confrontation with the USA, the most important ally.

Benny Gantz's departure from the war cabinet will be the greatest internal pressure on the prime minister to date, and it will have additional force because it follows the same line as the pressure coming from Washington.

For Prime Minister Netanyahu, this means a completely new situation that will force him to speed up plans to end the operation in Gaza and, at the same time, adapt them to his political survival ambitions.